

4.5.1 Interior Alaska

Communities

[Fairbanks](#)

[Galena](#)

Geographic Location

Fairbanks and Galena are the only communities in interior Alaska that met the selection criteria for this project. Fairbanks is located on the Chena River in the Tanana Valley, 358 miles north of Anchorage. It lies at approximately 64.84 °N Lat. Galena is 270 air miles west of Fairbanks, located on the Yukon River. It lies at about 64.73 °N Lat.

Weather

Interior Alaska's weather is characterized by extremes. Winter temperatures average -12 °F; summer temperatures average 61 °F. But the seasonal temperature swing in this region is one of the widest on earth, with recorded winter lows of -78 °F and summer highs of 93 °F—a swing of 171 °F. The latitude in Interior Alaska also makes for a high degree of seasonal variability of sunlight, with 4 hours of daylight in the winter and 21 hours of daylight in the summer. Precipitation in the region is relatively low, averaging 11.3 inches per year.

General Characterization

The current situation of Fairbanks is conditioned by its past. This region was the traditional territory of the Tanana Athabascan Indians for thousands of years prior to European contact. Similar to other Athabascan groups, the Tanana practiced a hunting and gathering lifestyle. That way of life changed dramatically in the late 1800s with the influx of European and American explorers interested in the natural resources of the region. By the early 1900s, when gold was discovered, Fairbanks was firmly on the path of large-scale development, a path that has continued with the establishment of U.S. military bases in the 1940s and 1950s, and the construction of the Trans-Alaska oil pipeline in the 1970s.

Today, the Fairbanks North Star Borough is home to some 85,000 inhabitants, 30,000 of whom live within the city limits of Fairbanks itself. The other residents are scattered throughout 10 smaller communities

located in the borough. The demographics of the region have changed dramatically over the course of time, owing to the factors noted above. In 2000, the racial composition of Fairbanks was primarily White, with relatively small minority groups of Alaska Natives, Blacks, and Hispanics. The gender composition of the community was relatively equal, reflecting a more permanent residential trend, in contrast to many of the working communities elsewhere in Alaska.

The area of Galena was historically occupied by Koyukon Athabascans which moved from camps each season with the migrating wild game. The community of Galena saw its major rise in growth from the development of military facilities in the area in the 1950s. The Air Force Station closed in 1993 and today the community has about 675 members of which over half the population were American Indian and Alaska Native. The rest of the population was largely White, but there existed also a small percentage of Black, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander community members. The ratio of men to women in Galena is heavily swayed, with a larger number of males in contrast to the more equal distribution in Fairbanks.

Institutional Framework

Fairbanks is located in the Fairbanks North Star Borough, one of only two organized boroughs in Interior Alaska. Fairbanks thus serves as an administrative hub for much of the interior region. Taxes are administered both by the city and by the borough. In addition, there are many important Native governmental bodies, including a regional Native non-profit corporation, a regional Native for-profit corporation, and various Native associations and village councils.

Galena is not located in any organized borough and the City administers its own sales tax and operates its own school district. Galena is somewhat similar to Fairbanks in that it acts as a regional transport center for neighboring villages. The City operates most of the

necessary facilities. A village council, Native village corporation, and Native regional corporation are all active in the community. In addition a regional Native health corporation is active in the area.

Commercial, Sport, and Subsistence Fisheries

Fairbanks serves as proof that reliance on marine resources extends well beyond the coastline. It is nearly 400 miles from Fairbanks to the Gulf of Alaska; nevertheless, the community has a substantial number of vessel owners, commercial permit holders, and registered crew members. There is even a commercial fish processing plant. In short, Fairbanks is proof that Alaska's commercial fishing industry is as much about networks and inter-community linkages as it is about location.

Sport fishing and subsistence fishing are also important economic factors for Fairbanks. Sport fishing guides based in Fairbanks ply their trade both in nearby interior lakes and rivers and at sea hundreds of miles away. In addition, despite residents' of Fairbanks urban surroundings, they still rely on subsistence fishing and hunting.

Galena is located particularly far in from the coast as well, however, not nearly as far as Fairbanks. Galena has an extensively higher ratio of commercial fishing permit holders in the community compared to the total population of the city. There is also a high proportion of sport fishing businesses to other businesses in Galena which cater to guiding tourists for freshwater

fishing and supplying other services. Subsistence is very important with a very large yearly per capita harvest for community members.

Regional Challenges

Interior Alaska faces a few interesting challenges, brought on primarily by its relatively remote location. Fairbanks has had to cope with a dramatic population boom in the last few decades brought on by the construction of the Trans-Alaska oil pipeline. From the 1970s onward, Fairbanks has dealt with an influx of people attracted by the pipeline and the construction boom it caused, along with a concomitant rise in problems ranging from crime to cost of living increases.

With Galena's commercial fishing sector heavily dependent upon salmon, problems have been created by recent falling prices attributed to competition with farmed salmon. This could perhaps be the reason that none of the salmon permits issued to residents of Galena in 2000 were fished. This struggle is also made visible by the recent allocation of federal salmon disaster funds to the community.

In addition, both Fairbanks' and Galena's involvement in North Pacific fisheries presents some peculiar problems. Because of its location far from any fishery, those who choose a livelihood based on fishing face either the challenge of seasonal relocation to coastal areas, or the challenge of overseeing fishing operations from afar.